

Historic, Archive Document

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The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is the Federal Government's single largest environmental improvement program and one of its most productive and cost-efficient. It is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) through the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Established in 1985, the CRP encourages farmers to voluntarily plant permanent areas of grass and trees on land that needs protection from erosion, to act as windbreaks, or in places where vegetation can improve water quality or provide food and habitat for wildlife. The farmers must enter into contracts with the CCC lasting between 10 and 15 years. In return, they receive annual rental payments, incentive payments for certain activities, and cost-share assistance to establish the protective vegetation.

In previous years, a landowner had to apply to participate in CRP during announced sign-up periods. Since September 1996, however, owners have been able to sign up for the program any time during the year for certain high-priority conservation practices. Provided certain eligibility requirements are met, acreage is automatically accepted into the program at a per-acre rental rate not to exceed the CCC's maximum payment amount.

Land owners and operators may be eligible to participate in the CRP. Landowners must have owned the acreage for at least 1 year and operators must have leased the acreage for at least 1 year to be eligible.

Land eligible for enrollment includes cropland that is physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner, and that has been planted or considered planted to an

agricultural commodity in any 2 years from 1992 to 1996. The acreage must also be determined eligible and suitable for any of the following practices:

Filter Strips

Areas of grass, legumes, or other vegetation that filter runoff or waste water by trapping sediment, pesticides, organic matter, or other pollutants. Filter strips are established on cropland at the lower edge of a field or adjacent to bodies of water.



Riparian Buffers

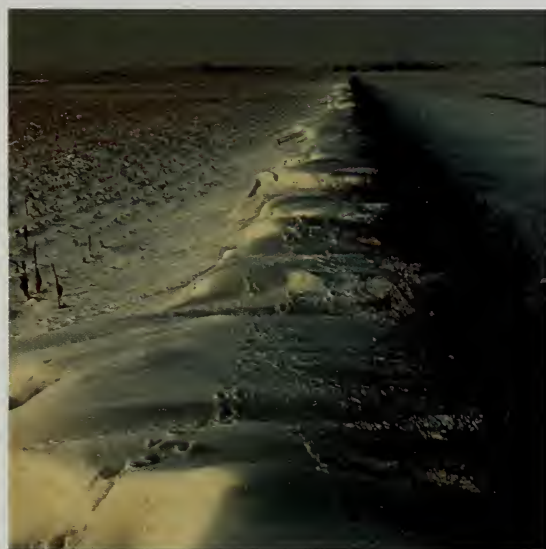
Areas of trees and/or shrubs, next to ponds, lakes, and streams that filter out pollutants from runoff, as well as providing shade for fish and other wildlife. The vegetation's natural litter also provides food and shelter for valuable wildlife.

Riparian buffers are planted so that runoff must filter through them before it reaches a pond, lake, or stream. Buffers can also be placed next to wetlands, such as marshy or swampy areas.



Shelter Belts, Field Windbreaks, and Living Snow Fences

Belts of trees or shrubs planted in single or multiple rows. Such tree rows and hedges reduce wind erosion, protect growing plants, and provide habitat for wildlife. They can also shelter structures and livestock. Field windbreaks protect fields from erosion, and snow fences help manage snow.



Grass Waterways

Channels, either natural or constructed, that are planted with suitable vegetation to protect soil from erosion during rains. Grass waterways can help heal gullies and washouts, and greatly reduce loss of topsoil and the sedimentation of streams, ponds, and lakes.



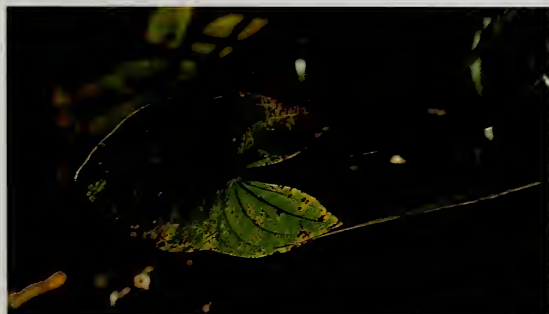
Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife

Small areas whose purpose is providing cover and a water source for wildlife. Water is impounded using embankments, berms, or other methods, and surrounded by a small area planted with permanent cover.



Salt-Tolerant Vegetation

Vegetation planted to reclaim areas in which saline water is seeping to the surface. Planted areas "upstream" reduce the amount of water recharging the seep, and salt-tolerant plants reclaim the contaminated seepage area.



Wellhead Protection Areas

Wellhead protection areas, designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or an appropriate State agency, help assure the safety of municipal water supplies drawn from wells. Vegetation planted in an area surrounding the wellhead will help protect the water supply from contamination.

Each of the conservation practices outlined above will be subject to further requirements under an approved conservation plan designed to maximize effectiveness and longevity.

To learn more about the Conservation Reserve Program, write to the following address:

**USDA FSA Public Affairs Staff
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
STOP 0506
Washington DC 20250-0506**

Information on FSA can also be found on the FSA's World Wide Web home page, at **www.fsa.usda.gov**

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